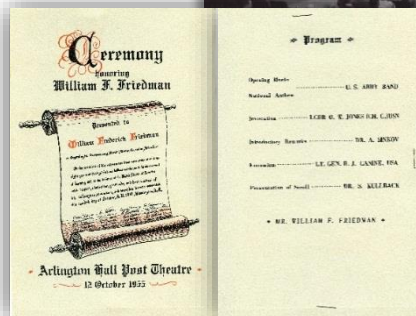


## The Friedman Conference Center, Part I July 19

The intermingling of the NSA/CSS workforce occurs in many spaces throughout the Fort George G. Meade campus: the cafeterias, the coffee shops, and the drug store to name just a few. None, however, are as near and dear to the collective heart of the NSA/CSS workforce as the Friedman Conference Center. This space has been NSA's communal meeting place since the opening of its first building (today known as the William and Elizebeth Friedman Operations Building, or OPS1) at Fort Meade in 1957. The space will reopen in 2018 as the Friedman Conference Center after its largest and most extensive renovation to date.

Like many of the foundational elements of NSA, the idea for a large meeting space migrated from Arlington Hall Station as the newly established agency made the move from Virginia (and Washington, D.C.) to Maryland in the mid-1950s. Prior to the establishment of NSA, the Armed Forces Security Agency (AFSA) workforce attended large ceremonies in the Arlington Hall Post Theater. Fittingly, one of the last major events held at the Post Theater was the 1955 retirement ceremony and National Security Medal presentation for William F. Friedman, the father of American cryptology and founder of the US government's cryptologic enterprise.



*On 12 October 1955, William Friedman accepted the National Security Medal during his retirement ceremony in the Arlington Hall Post Theater. The Operations Building at Fort Meade was still under construction*



*General Canine, USA, retired, at an award ceremony in 1967. Note the projection equipment in the background. The General fought for an auditorium that would be “modern for 50 years.”*

While the construction of an auditorium was proposed by AFSA and NSA officials from the building design stage, it was not an easy sell. Initially, the proposal to include the auditorium (as well as other special features) was perceived as an extraneous add-on that exceeded 1950s’ austerity standards for military construction projects. AFSA Director Lieutenant General Ralph J. Canine was forced to justify the need for an auditorium and other building features to the U.S. Army G-4 Logistics, the Army

Chief of Engineers, and eventually the Secretary of Defense. General Canine believed the auditorium and other special features were “essential for operations.” He refused to “settle for a shabby, poorly constructed building” and demanded that it be “modern for 50 years.” He got his wish.

The Operations building groundbreaking occurred in 1954; however, redesign and other construction issues pushed the final move-in-ready date to 1957. The total cost for the entire Operations Building was roughly \$35 million, only about \$2 million over budget. The third-floor auditorium was used for assemblies, training activities, and special groups that required high-tech projection and acoustical features. Initially designed with a flat floor and folding chairs for seating, the space could accommodate between 400 and 500 people. And what General Canine wanted, General Canine got. The auditorium remained somewhat unchanged –only a few renovations and upgrades – until this year.



*An audience in 1967 shows how the auditorium still featured folding chairs 10 years after its debut. Note the film crew in the background.*

Stay tuned. In a future article, we will describe the origins of how the Friedman Conference Center was memorialized in honor of William Friedman.

*Sources: The Frank Rowlett Collection at the National Cryptologic Museum,*

502 captions: photos 1 & 2: An overhead shot of the audience in the Arlington Hall Post Theater, with an inset of a close-up of William Friedman at the lectern and a copy of Friedman's retirement ceremony program; photo 3: The retired General Canine standing in the audience at an auditorium event in 1967; photo 4: An auditorium event in 1967 showing the audience sitting in folding chairs.